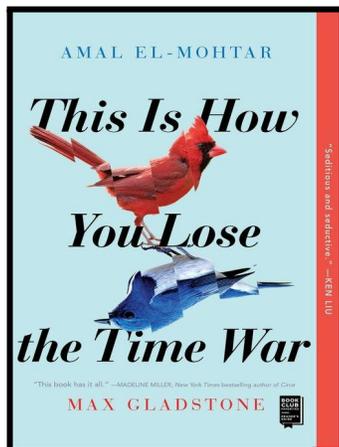




This Is How You Lose a Time War Reader's Guide



This Is How You Lose a Time War
By Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone
Simon & Schuster

[A Simon & Schuster Reading Group Guide](#)

*This reading group guide for **This Is How You Lose the Time War** includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.*

Introduction

In the ashes of a dying world, Red finds a letter marked “Burn before reading. Signed, Blue.”

So begins an unlikely correspondence between two rival agents in a war that stretches through the vast reaches of time and space.

Red belongs to the Agency, a post-singularity technotopia. Blue belongs to Garden, a single vast consciousness embedded in all organic matter. Their pasts are bloody and their futures mutually exclusive. They have nothing in common—save that they’re the best, and they’re alone.



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Now what began as a battlefield boast grows into a dangerous game, one both Red and Blue are determined to win. Because winning's what you do in war. Isn't it?

Topics & Questions for Discussion

1. As Red and Blue are executing their respective orders, they have their first exchange. Describe the warriors introduced in these first few opening challenges. Is one more dedicated to their cause than the other?
2. Red and Blue are sworn enemies in a timeless war and while they joke about poison, "PS. The Keyboard's coated with slow-acting contact poison. You'll be dead in an hour" (p. 30), they never use it. Why have they never tried to kill each other? Why do they continue to open the letters? Is it trust, or something else?
3. "Do I have you still... You could leave me for five years, you could return never—and I have to write the rest of this not knowing," (page 42). There are physical limitations to the way Red and Blue choose to communicate. With the most advanced technology at their fingertips, why have they chosen to leave their messages in these unique mediums?
4. Blue writes a lot about Atlantis in one of her early letters. Discuss why this is a myth the authors choose to highlight and why Atlantis, of all places, recurs with the same result in every strand? Do you accept Red's responding explanation?
5. There are many subtle pop-culture references made as Red and Blue move through time. Which references did you pick up on? Which were your favorites?
6. Red quotes "the prophets" several times. Who do you think the prophets are for warriors out of time? Based on the quotes she recites, do you believe they are considered prophets here in the 21st century?
7. Blue speaks very little about the opposition except to say, "The thought of your disembodied network repulses me, but I look at you, Red, and see much of myself; a desire to be apart, sometimes, to understand who I am without the rest," (page 72). What do we know of Blue and Red's organizations? Would you consider them communities? What are the differences between the two?



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8. Blue makes a dramatic and risky move on page 46 to save Red in the past. This is early in Blue and Red's relationship. Discuss Blue's decision to act and why this moment is significant.
9. The seeker appears at the end of every chapter, chasing letters and collecting evidence. Who is the seeker? What is their purpose? What is their role in this time war?
10. Discuss how Red and Blue each come to realize they are in love. What made it apparent to you? Does it happen more easily for one than the other?
11. There is little proof that the shadow Red senses is real. What proof does she offer? Sometimes even she does not completely believe her theory. What makes you believe or doubt her?
12. Red and Blue each interact with their leaders once through the book. What are the notable differences between The Commandant and Garden? Who would you rather work for?
13. Red's final letter to Blue is extremely complex. Discuss its many layers and her decision to write a letter within the poison. What would you write if you were in her position?
14. Why does Blue open Red's poison letter after Red warns her that it is a trap? Describe the tone of her dying letter. Is it a betrayal?
15. Red makes a very risky move that will have dire consequences if things don't align perfectly. How many ways could her plan go wrong? Discuss Red's mindset before, during and at the end of this impossible mission.

Enhance Your Book Club

1. Every move in the Time War is carefully calculated and chosen for it's the far-reaching ramifications. Even chaos is purposefully created. Discuss how difficult it would be to choose the right moments to change. How does this compare to war as we know it?
2. Letters were once the only form of communication and people had lasting relationships with their pen pals. Discuss how communication has changed and how that affects relationships. Are technological advances an improvement?



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3. Imagine you are an agent fighting in this Time War, dancing along the braids. What would it be like to see all the different strands? Would you like to experience all of time in the way Red and Blue do? What kind of agent would you be?



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